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18th Annual ARTS Awards: Academy of Achievement Honoree Judy George

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George

Judy George is known for many things. Perhaps most well-regarded is her eagerness to break new ground—even when it means breaking the rules. After all, without George's bold thinking, we likely would not have Domain Home Fashions, the chain of 27 home stores that quite literally changed the way home furnishings are sold in this country, a feat that helped earn George this year's ARTS Academy of Achievement award.

From Domain's inception, George relied heavily on fashionable home accessories to tell lifestyle merchandising stories. Her fresh approach delighted consumers and surprised industry veterans who had long dismissed accessories as mere window decoration. At Domain, however, accessories were the key to connecting with alienated home furnishings shoppers.

"Lifestyle marketing is a buzz word today, but in those days, retailing was all about selling row upon row of furniture," George says. "I built beautiful, aspirational

store environments. Accessories were the biggest part of it all, and without them I don't think there would have been a Domain."

George's pioneering merchandising strategy was a "major contribution to the industry," says The RomWeber Co.'s Bruce Rippe. "She has raised the awareness in the marketplace of design and helped the public feel more comfortable with the choices that they make in home [decor]."

Paladin Furniture's Tim Bolick believes George showed other retailers how to add value to home furnishings through inspired merchandising.

"She has taken a male-dominated, how-low-can-you-go, no-interest-payments-forever industry and put real value in home furnishings," Bolick says. "Sure, every other furniture retailer sells furniture, but Judy puts romance and fashion into furnishing a home."

Never one to rest on her laurels, George has continued to search for intriguing marketing concepts that engage the customer. To that end, she engineered Domain's March 2002 acquisition by Aga Foodservice group, the United Kingdom-based consumer and commercial kitchen products company. This same-store merger of high-end kitchen equipment with home furnishings has taken the idea of lifestyle marketing to a new level and expanded Domain's reach from the living, dining and bedroom into the kitchen, the very heart of the home. With cooking and entertaining now among the fastest-growing businesses in the United States, George has made sure that Domain is beautifully poised for future success.

Vintage Judy

In 1976, turned down by a new furniture store called Hamilton's yet still determined to create a substantial career for herself, George secretly "borrowed" \$10,000 from her husband's bank account to hire a plane to fly over Hamilton's with a banner that proclaimed: "Hire Judy George. She'll make you millions."

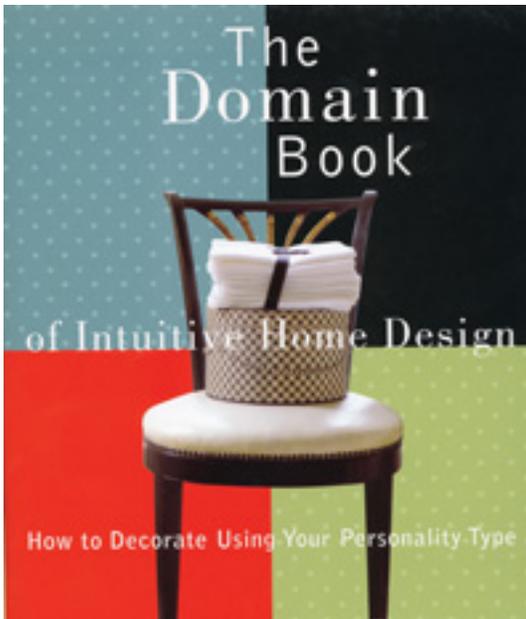
The plane flew over the store every day until Mr. Hamilton sent the police to visit George with a cease-and-desist order—and then hired her. Her new title was Director of Design, and after Hamilton's was bought out by Scandinavian Design, she worked her way up to President before launching her very own Domain Home Fashions.



Smart men make sure George is on their side. Here (above), she snuggles up to her lifelong mate, husband Simon George, and shakes hands with former President Bill Clinton.

Hitting The Street

In a bid to convince venture capitalists of the merits of her ideas for a new kind of home furnishings store, George traveled across the United States with a camera crew in the mid-1980s, conducting exit interviews with shoppers as they left various types of stores.



"When I asked them about their furniture-buying experience, they said they hated it," she recalls.

Those emotional testimonials, combined with George's ability to articulate a compelling vision for a new breed of store, resulted in successful funding and the first Domain store opening in 1986. Her research also helped her define the four customer personality types—Visionaries, Artisans, Idealists and Adventurers—upon which she based her retail philosophy and, later, her classic book, *The Domain Book of Intuitive Home Design*.

